

Feb 99

10

Appleby Archaeology Group

On February 2nd the group enjoyed a talk from Andrew Pierce on Prehistoric Hunters and Gatherers.

He started by outlining what Britain would have been like around 9000-4000BC, the Mesolithic period. Fascinating maps showed present thinking on the changing sea levels and coastlines in north west Europe from the last Ice Age to 5000BC. It is possible that the Channel land bridge between Europe and Britain remained much later than 6000BC and with it islands in the Channel for example Dogger Island.

The climate became warmer as the ice retreated reaching an optimum, some degrees higher than today in the Late Mesolithic. As the climate changed so did the landscape and vegetation, tundra and grassland on which herd animals, reindeer, horse and bison roamed, gave way to cold temperate forest and then to mixed deciduous woodland where red deer, roe deer, elk and wild boar grazed.

Mesolithic sites are concentrated in the south and east of Britain. Settlements in Scotland and the North expanded around 6000BC. The people were hunter-gatherers living off game and vegetation. The evidence of settlements is limited coming from for example, lithic scatters and middens. It indicates that people moved between upland, lowland and coastal camps on a seasonal basis to maximise the use of resources. The artefacts that have been found include flint and chert tools scrapers, blades and microliths, bone and antler harpoon points, mattocks and pins. These finds provide the main clues to life in the Mesolithic.

At some sites fine stake holes are found, were they made by tent pegs? On some sites areas appear to have been used for different functions including skin preparation, cooking, flint knapping and there are midden areas. Fresh water sources were nearby.

The Mesolithic, in Cumbria is considered to be from 5000BC-3500BC. The majority of Cumbrian late Paleolithic and Mesolithic sites have been found by the coast and include sites at Drigg, St Bees and Eskmeals, these are similar to those found on the west coast of Scotland. Clusters of sites have been identified on the limestone areas around Barrow and on Orton Scar. Sites in Upper Weardale and Upper Teesdale were probably hunting camps for people of today's Yorkshire.

Mr Pierce concluded his talk by showing a series of slides of artefacts to demonstrate advances in technology over the period.

Visit to Tullie House .

Continuing the prehistoric theme 14 members of the group were able to examine prehistoric artefacts under the guidance of the archaeology curator at the Tullie House museum in Carlisle on 26/2/99. Among the stone artefacts seen and handled were Langdale polished axes, flint arrow heads, beads and spindle whorls. Examples of pottery from burial sites from as early as 3000BC were admired. Bronze artefacts examined included parts of spearheads and a series of axes showing the developments in the technology. The afternoon concluded with a visit to the prehistory section of the museum.

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